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October 18, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W., Room TW-B204
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Reply to comments by Buckeye Hills Regional Council Regarding the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund WC Docket NOS. 19-126 and 10-90

Madam Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to comments submitted by the Buckeye Hills Regional Council on Sep. 19, 2019. Ohio University would like to express strong support for those comments regarding proposed modifications to the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF).

As a public university in rural southeastern Ohio with regional and extension campuses around the state, OHIO is committed to leveraging our academic strengths to solve problems for our communities, state, and beyond. Ubiquitous, affordable, reliable broadband is a key success factor for building and supporting vibrant communities in Appalachian Ohio. It also is essential to fostering a culture of access and inclusion in our region.

Southeast Ohio is desperately in need of expanded digital connectivity. While OHIO may be able to offer high capacity, high capability, high availability internet within the confines of our campuses, beyond our borders you will find a very different situation. Travel just a handful of miles from any OHIO campus, and you will encounter large regions with little or no cellular coverage and a complete lack of broadband. For the individuals and families who live in these unserved areas, internet access is expensive and slow when it is available at all. Wired infrastructure is nonexistent due to low population densities and high installation costs, and wireless technologies are limited in coverage due to economic and topographic challenges.

Such conditions create significant barriers to entry for companies interested in moving to southeast Ohio. The situation also can be a major sticking point for existing businesses and institutions who need to recruit

new employees. Technology-related jobs, in particular, often require employees to have reliable, fast internet access at home to handle on-call and incident response duties. A candidate who lives in one of the many unserved or underserved parts of our region can be closed out of the job market regardless of skills or potential. Likewise, current and prospective university students in these underserved areas can find themselves at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers from better connected areas of the state.

RDOF investment in broadband infrastructure will go a long way toward breaking down these barriers to creating and supporting vibrant communities in our region.

Cordially,

M. Duane Nellis, Ph.D.
President